



Tom Feeney, R-Orlando, has used the earmark request, but he says he wants to pass legislation to limit its use.

Feeney wants to end pork process

BY LARRY WHEELER
FLORIDA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The congressional earmarks process is "totally out of control" because lawmakers won't say no to spending requests, Rep. Tom Feeney said this week.

"Telling people you can't support their earmark is a little bit like telling them their baby is ugly," said Feeney, a conservative Republican.

The congressman acknowledged he participates in the process to obtain funding for what he describes as worthy projects in his district.

But bringing the process into the light by requiring disclosure would do a lot to weed out the "ugly babies," Feeney said.

A former Speaker of the Florida House, Feeney came from a legislature where lawmakers are required to disclose requests for special funding of hometown projects.

He is working to craft a similar rule to curb Congress' appetite for pet projects.

To prove his commitment to disclosure, Feeney's office released a list detailing more than 30 funding requests sent to appropriators last year.

Among the projects Feeney requested:

- \$4.4 million for projects at the National Center for Simulation in Orlando.

- \$10 million for the Max Brewer Bridge in Brevard County.

- \$60,000 for the city of Cocoa to install mobile data centers and video cameras in police cars.

The simulation center and bridge projects received funding.

This year's funding requests from Feeney's office were not available because they were being assembled before a March 16 deadline.

Feeney's remarks and willingness to disclose his funding requests contrast with the stance taken by fellow Space Coast congressman Dave Weldon, R-Indian River, a member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee.

Weldon supports some reform measures, including: limiting the number of earmarks, giving the president authority to strike specific projects from spending bills and a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

Weldon's office declined to release any details of spending requests made to the committee.

"Each request is evaluated on its merits and the appropriate subcommittee conducts further evaluations to determine if they fit within the funding confines established by law," his office said.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Orlando, took an unusual step Thursday and released the details of all the earmark requests he made last year.

The list includes dozens of Florida projects worth tens of millions of dollars. Few of the projects were included in the final appropriations bills Congress passed last year.

Nelson's spokesman, Dan McLaughlin, said the senator released the list to show that he supports earmark reform the Senate is considering that would require such disclosures in the future, if passed by Congress and signed into law by the president.

Some examples that ultimately were not funded, include:

- \$3.9 million for a new control tower at Naval Air Station Whiting Field.

- \$6.2 million for a Cape Canaveral Air Station Satellite Processing Facility.

- \$3 million for Babcock Ranch land acquisition.

Longtime critics of pork-barrel spending said it's not surprising that lawmakers like Weldon, elected in the 1994 "Republican revolution" that promised to reform Congress, want to protect the perks.

"Washington does funny things to good people," said Keith Ashdown, vice president of policy and communications for Taxpayers for Common Sense, a budget watchdog group.

"In the matter of just a little more than 10 years, Weldon has become what he attempted to reform when he came to Congress," Ashdown said. ■

Contact Wheeler at
lwheeler@gns.gannett.com